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SUBJECT: FRANCE PROPOSES INFORMAL MEETING OF AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS FOR END NOVEMBER

REF: A. PARIS POINTS FOR SEPTEMBER 23

[¶](#)B. 2008

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (U) This is an action request, see paragraph 7.

[¶](#)2. (C) Summary. On October 15, Pol M/C met with Philippe Errera, Strategic Affairs advisor to FM Kouchner, to discuss the French proposal for a meeting to discuss regional cooperation among Afghanistan's neighbors. Errera apologized that the initiative was publicized in the French press before GOF officials were able to consult Kabul and key allies. He assured us that Paris was not/not proposing creation of a new international forum, but rather a one-time informal meeting to address regional issues such as counternarcotics, counterinsurgency, infrastructure and energy and regional trade. The idea originated in some of the bilateral meetings that France hosted during the EU-Central Asia forum in September and the GOF would welcome our input on format, themes, outcomes and participants, although they have sketched out some preliminary suggestions, noted in further detail below. End summary.

CONTEXT

[¶](#)3. (C) Errera noted that all countries interested in Afghanistan have put forward the idea of improving regional cooperation as one way to further political and economic development. He emphasized that this element was also included in the Bucharest NATO summit's conclusions earlier this year. He clarified that the GOF had no/no intention of creating a new international forum on Afghanistan, but merely to host a one-time informal discussion to draw attention to practical regional proposals. The initiative is also an effort to demonstrate to the European audience (and French public) that efforts are being made to address the broader strategy of political and economic development, as well as to improve security via an augmented military operation. This was an important element in France's recent parliamentary debate to reauthorize deployment of French troops in Afghanistan (ref a). Errera regretted that the initiative was publicized in the French press before the GOF had an opportunity to consult with Kabul and key allies, noting ruefully that he himself learned of the proposal in the press as it had not been vetted within the French bureaucracy before the announcement appeared. Errera has since traveled to London to brief UK allies, and noted that the French

embassies in Washington and Kabul had provided additional information to key interlocutors yesterday in their respective cities.

SUGGESTED THEMES/PARTICIPANTS

¶4. (C) Errera stated that the GOF would be happy to work with us to identify common challenges that could be addressed in this type of informal meeting. Paris was considering counternarcotics, counter-insurgency efforts, infrastructure, energy and regional trade (the latter suggested by the UK) as possible themes for the meeting. He emphasized that the meeting would not/not address the issue of reconciliation, which is a sensitive subject that must be led by Afghanistan.

Errera informed us that there was no intent to establish a "Friends of Afghanistan" type of forum or to host a full-fledged conference. Rather, their hopes are that the meeting would give political impetus to concrete regional projects.

¶5. (C) Errera acknowledged that there was "no good answer" to the question of which countries should participate in the meeting. The GOF wants to focus on countries that share a common border with Afghanistan, namely: Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and possibly China. Errera said that the question of Chinese participation was an open one, noting that the Chinese had "torpedoed" the "Friends of Pakistan" meeting on the margins of the UNGA; however, it was better to invite them than not. He speculated that it may be best to have the meeting take place under the auspices of the UN and the P5, so they could include countries such as the U.S. and U.K. which have huge stakes in the region, but would not open the meeting to all interested non-neighbors.

Responding to our question, he said the French share a concern about inviting Iran at a time when we are also isolating Iran for its failure to cooperate on the nuclear issue, but believe it best to include them, in part because the Afghans would insist and in part because it would show them what they are missing by pursuing the nuclear path. The French would host the meeting in their capacity as President of the EU and would therefore want to include the European Commission. The GOF would also like to invite UN Special Representative Kai Eide. The meeting would take place at the FM's residence in St. Cloud, with mid- to late-November as the likely time frame.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

¶6. (C) Errera said that the GOF did not anticipate formal conclusions at the end of the meeting; however, they were open to issuing a Chairman's statement or summary, or reaching agreement on some key points (either publicly or privately). He reiterated that there was no/no long term plan for follow-on meetings; the goal is merely to provide a useful stepping stone to further regional cooperation. Errera concluded the meeting by expressing strong interest in USG views and input.

¶7. (C) Comment and action request. After a public launch that caught everyone (including France's own bureaucracy) by surprise, the MFA has made an effort to respond to our concerns and requests for further information. We emphasized that Washington's initial and informal reaction had not been favorable, noted that the reaction of the government of Afghanistan would be a critical element to this proposal and promised to pass the above readout to Washington as soon as possible. Given the short time frame that the GOF is proposing to organize such a meeting, our opportunity to approve, reject or help shape this proposal is limited and post would appreciate guidance soonest to respond to the above points. End Comment.